

# How Artists Use Rhythm to Create Movement

**A**rtists use rhythm in a work of art just as they use the elements and other principles of art—to convey feelings and ideas. Rhythm, which can be comforting and predictable, can also be monotonous, symbolic, or graceful, depending on the artist’s goals. Rhythm can also create visual movement.

## Visual Movement

**Visual movement** is *the principle of art used to create the look and feeling of action and to guide the viewer’s eyes throughout the work of art.* In **Figure 8.18**, the artist has used visual movement to tell her story. Xiong has arranged the figures and objects in her art using visual rhythm to create the sense of movement. The main beat is Xiong’s family. Notice how the figures change slightly from one appearance to the next. Is the rhythm random, alternating, or progressive?



## Vocabulary

visual movement  
kinetic

◀ **FIGURE 8.18** This story cloth tells the story of the artist’s flight from Laos, across the Mekong River, to an American refugee camp in Thailand. The story starts in the upper right corner. Can you follow the family as it moves toward safety?

Chaing Xiong. *Hmong Story Cloth*. 1987. Pieced and embroidered polyester, cotton blend. 140.3 × 145.4 cm (55¼ × 57¼”). Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut. Florence Paull Berger Fund.



▲ **FIGURE 8.19** What kind of rhythm does Stella use to create this celebration of movement and light at the Coney Island Amusement Park? Which elements does he use to create his rhythms?

Joseph Stella. *Battle of Lights, Coney Island, Mardi Gras*. 1913–14. Oil on canvas. 1.9 × 2.2 m (6'4" × 7'1"). Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

One group of artists tried to do more than control the way in which viewers looked at works of art. This group of artists, called the *Futurists*, used rhythm to capture the idea of movement itself. The Futurists used the word *dynamism* to refer to the forces of movement. They believed that nothing was solid or stable and that art should show such dynamism. In their artworks, the dynamic movement of forms is shown by slanting

and overlapping shapes. In **Figure 8.19**, the artist, Joseph Stella, captures the excitement and movement of the Amusement Park at Coney Island. A frenzy of movement is created through the use of rhythms and patterns of colors and shapes. Can you find indications of amusement park rides such as a Ferris wheel and a roller coaster? Do you recognize any other rides? Can you find indications of people?



◀ **FIGURE 8.20**  
Look closely at the places where the rods are joined by a carefully planned set of loops. Calder's works are so carefully balanced that the slightest movement of air will set the sculpture in motion. Watching a Calder sculpture is like watching a graceful dancer.

Alexander Calder. *Untitled*.  
c. 1942. Painted aluminum sheet, steel sheet, and steel wire.  
147.3 × 182.9 × 114.3 cm (58 × 72 × 45").  
Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. 1999.6.  
© 2003 Estate of Alexander Calder/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

You can also see movement in the visual art of Alexander Calder. He was a mechanical engineer who believed in what the Futurists were doing. In his work he repeated abstract shapes and put them into real motion. He did this using the real forces of air currents and gravity. Calder's creations were dubbed **kinetic** sculpture, because they *actually move in space* (**Figure 8.20**). Artist Marcel Duchamp gave Calder's moving sculptures another name, *mobiles*. Moving sculptures of this kind have been called mobiles ever since.

### Check Your Understanding

1. Define *visual movement*.
2. Which group of artists used rhythm to capture the idea of movement itself?
3. Describe a kinetic sculpture.
4. Compare and contrast the use of rhythm in Figure 8.18 on page 211 and Figure 8.19 on page 212.